

*Hearing the Silence:  
Responding to the Call of Children*

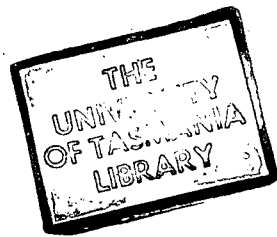
**Helen Anderson  
B.Mus. (Hons.)**

**Submitted as an eighteen point dissertation towards the degree of  
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**School of Education, University of Tasmania**

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THESIS  
ANDERSON  
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## **Abstract**

**This paper seeks to illuminate a teaching life. It has its origin in the reality of that particular teaching life - the joys, concerns, questions, and reflections that emerge in the search for authenticating the seemingly intangible, unspoken nature of that life.**

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# Hearing the Silence: Responding to the Call of Children

## Prelude

It may seem odd to talk about hearing silence, given the noise and clamour of our everyday world - even more paradoxical to think about hearing silence in the world of the classroom. It seems that silence is a state that we often wish for, a kind of still emptiness where we might find momentary peace and succour amidst the hubbub of our modern, stressful lives. How do we understand silence - what meanings does it hold for us? Do we understand it merely as an absence of noise - a state of non-hearing? What does silence mean to a person who is deaf? Sometimes we talk of silence as ominous or threatening and other times we speak of a pregnant silence - a waiting or an expectation of something imminent. Musically, we appreciate silence in relation to sound. We respond to the juxtaposition of sound and silence often vicariously, being carried along by insistent rhythms and beats, or being lulled into a soporific stupor by less urgent and more ill-defined configurations of sound and silence. The setting in which silence occurs then is vital - what comes before it, what surrounds it and what follows, is the context by which we might appreciate its meaning.

Commencing this paper with the idea of hearing silence is a bit like opening a novel in the middle pages. How it came to be and what it may lead to is as yet untold. Thus, having opened with this snippet of what for me, was a turning point in my thinking about teaching, I would like to go back a little in time, revisiting the events and experiences that brought me to this understanding - reflecting upon and sharing the concerns and questions that shaped my present thinking.

\* \* \* \*

I came to teaching as a mature adult with a family of my own, a rich and varied life history and an overwhelming sense of vocation. My earliest expressions of interest in a career path were toward teaching. As I recall it seemed a foregone conclusion in my secondary years of schooling. Perhaps my entering teaching life as an adult, with a strong sense of identity and a wide life experience, was a redeeming factor in the choices I subsequently made when faced with the dilemmas that arose in my teaching life.

In those early days I was unsure of the true nature of my concerns. I wondered if perhaps the gap between theory and practice was so wide that I had emerged from university with a rarefied view of classroom life that was of little practical value in the real context. Was I remiss in my interpretation of what it is to teach music and art? Had I come to teaching with my hard-won qualifications and sense of conviction and calling, only to be left with a pervading sense of unease and disquiet in the place we call school? These questions assailed my early teaching life and coloured my thoughts to such a degree that it undermined the very fabric of my belief in myself as a teacher.

Within the life-world of teaching (in both the personal realm and within the wider context of schools), is a complex tapestry of attitudes, beliefs and values that are translated into actions by the intentions and purposes inherent in, and informed by the assumptions and presuppositions upon which they rest. It became increasingly evident that the core of my dilemma was firmly rooted in the nature of those intrinsic presuppositions and assumptions. There was an obvious incongruence between my understanding of children and what it means to be a teacher, and the actual reality of teaching in the realm of schooling.

It seemed that I was responding to, rather than actively participating in shaping educative practice. Was I to merely function and not think? I struggled under the oppressive persuasion of a well-structured and defined educative code that had already deemed what was valuable and right for children, and had no real interest in my educative values, beliefs or visions.

No matter how seemingly benevolent were the educative initiatives and curriculum directives, there were few, if any, voices that coloured the deafening unison of conformity.

As a teacher of music and art I was, in a sense, already marginalised by the relatively lowly ranking afforded these subjects in the curriculum hierarchy. The educative value of these ways of experiencing the world is subsumed by a valuing of subjects that have come to be known as the 'hard core' of curriculum - Maths, Science and Literacy. Much of the vision that had imbued my thinking during my university days was being tarnished by the constant struggle to be recognised as an educator in a *bona fide* curriculum area, and not just as a person who plays an instrument or can draw.

What does vision mean? Does it describe what I see or what I envisage? I was struggling to make sense of my teaching life; to find meanings, and the language in which to express those meanings, relevant to the context of my teaching life. The word vision held for me the notion of what is seen and what might be seen or envisaged. It has an almost spiritual quality that speaks of revelation, holding the promise of enlightenment or insight in what is seen and what is envisaged.

Indeed, even speaking about the idea of personal and educational visions in settings like staff meetings, or in the many committees and teams that proliferate in schools, often invites criticism of 'being too philosophical', (implying perhaps that philosophical questions lack a practical orientation to the everyday issues of teaching and learning, or are merely thought of as 'given').

Within the more formal educative settings like staff meetings, seminars or the like, we tend to speak in a very different way than if we are conversing with a colleague in less formal contexts. In the latter situation teachers share their thoughts and dilemmas almost in a sense of confidentiality - as though we all share a 'guilty secret' about the true nature of classroom life. The talk is often coloured by the personal and poignant reflections of the many

unpredictable and special moments that we share with children. We are more likely to hear of the hurts, pains, hopes and joys of classroom life and more able to find the connections between these experiences and their meaning within the teaching and learning sphere. Where is the match between the experience of teaching and the talk about teaching? What sense am I to make of this mismatch - this sense of something missing? What is missing?

In the face of the extreme pressure that is exerted by the dominant educative hierarchy to control ideology, predetermine outcomes and educative ends and maintain an unjust and inequitable *status quo*, I began to seek new possibilities - different ways of experiencing and thinking about teaching and learning. I looked within the specific, unique, uncertain and unpredictable world of my own classrooms, seeking that which seemed to dwell in that life world - hidden, unspoken yet, in some way calling to be brought to light. Perhaps deeper insights and understandings might renew my spirit and bolster my educative courage, illuminating what it means to teach and to dwell with children pedagogically.

I began to write. I kept a journal that recorded the thoughts and events of my teaching life. I found a rich well from which I could dip and draw at any time, and upon which I could ponder and reflect with the benefit of hindsight. The undertaking of a higher degree linked me with other questing voices via my reading and the richness of the educative conversations, augmenting my field of vision and challenging my educative imagination.

These writings opened up a new dimension in my teaching life. Where previously there had been frustration and doubt there was now an emerging sense of hope and expectation. The language of these writings was alive with the vibrancy of the moment and coloured with metaphoric phrases that helped to hold that vibrancy in symbolic form. This language was liberating that which had seemed illusive - it called forth the human face of teaching - it described more fully the intuitive and creative decisions and action that occur every day in a myriad of different ways and contexts - it held within it



the reality of the situation - and perhaps the true values and beliefs that informed my educative actions.

This paper is an inquiry into my life with children as a music and art teacher. It goes beyond the brief biographical sketch above, to describe the domain of my teaching life and the thinking that is continually uncovering the new and unexpected, as well as the old and unnoticed features that give it its essential nature. It inquires into what it means for me to be a teacher. The question of meaning is fundamental in this discussion. It led me beyond that which seemed 'given' or 'obvious' in the dominant language of teaching to seek meanings that illuminated that which seemed hidden or missing in that dominant discourse and yet which seemed to live in the complex life world of the classroom.

#### First excerpt

*I remember Ben in the early part of last year declaring adamantly, "I'm not gunna dance - no way!" Nor would Ben do much else other than hang a drum loudly and persistently, as often as possible. Yet, there was Ben at the end of the year, silently sitting in front of his xylophone with tears running down his cheeks during the rehearsal of one of our class pieces.*

*As I comforted Ben, I asked him why he was so upset. "Because I just can't play my part." I asked him if he felt worried about my being cross if he couldn't play his piece. "No" he said. "I just want it to be right!"*

*I was stunned! Where was the dissident bravado? Where was the resistance and the mockery that had marked his uncertainty with music? As the rest of the class, happy for this unexpected opportunity, played noisily on their instruments, Ben and I worked together on his xylophone finding ways to overcome his difficulties. There was a kind of privacy in our togetherness - a kind of 'giving' that is difficult to describe. We shared a relationship that went beyond merely fixing a difficulty, or working through a problem. I began to ponder - I wondered about the complex interrelationship between Ben, myself and music. How could I have missed Ben's*

*transformation? Wasn't Ben's 'break-through' with music the moment we all long for in our teaching lives? Had Ben not cried, might this special moment have remained submerged in the noise and activity of everyday living in the music room? Had Ben not been so passionate about his part in the piece, might his commitment have been overlooked, or perhaps worse still, taken for granted?*

Reflecting anew on this first journal entry brings to mind the poignancy of this moment and how easily it may have been overlooked in remedying Ben's immediate musical difficulty. So much more than the acceptance and learning of content was at stake at this time - Ben had learned to trust himself, and me, and to care about playing his part to best of his ability. It was more than his having learned a skill or even coming to accept music as worthwhile. Ben cared deeply about his part in the music, and it was recognising this transformation that gave me such joy yet, at the same time filled me with alarm at the thought that it may have been missed. I wondered also about the tension and pain that Ben experienced and its connection with his care and commitment to give of his best. We talk of creating a safe and supportive environment, but little of the pain and tension that lives within our lives with children. Ben's feelings were not born of fear as much as passion. Is this not the nature of human striving, not just in the arts, but in life in general?

Ours had been a difficult history, fraught with tension in Ben's rejection of things musical. The drum of course was a different matter - and it was with the drum that our journey began. Access to the drum could have been denied him in the face of his difficult and obstreperous behaviour. That access was tempered with only the proviso that it was shared with others, no other conditions were attached to its use. Perhaps that was the beginning of his learning to trust? Could it have been when he first felt that he had 'got it right'? Might it have occurred when he finally let go his fear and joined in with creative movement and dance? I don't know.

There seem to be many special moments that go unnoticed, unrevealed and unquestioned in the pace and tempo of classroom life. Does living in the

crowded, busy classroom allow for the stillness, space and time to think about children, the arts and teaching? Given that we might make this time and create the space to ponder, what sense would we make of those moments? How would we think about them? What questions would we ask? What would it mean in our teaching lives and in the lives of the children we teach?

### **An orientation to 'Inquiry'**

*'Whoever is searching for the human being first must find the lantern.'*

In this short, pithy maxim Nietzsche was referring to the Greek philosopher Diogenes, who it is said walked the city in daylight with a lit lantern as though seeking something. When questioned as to his purposes, he answered that "even with a lamp in broad daylight I cannot find a real human being".

His questioners promptly pointed to themselves as examples of that which he sought only to be chased with a stick as Diogenes shouted, "it is real human beings I want". (van Manen, 1990:5). It would seem that Diogenes was not content with thinking that we are automatically human, but that being human is something we must try to be. His pantomime raises the fundamental question of what is the nature of being human, and perhaps his light was the means of illumination. Nietzsche's reference to Diogenes raises two similar questions: What does it mean to study the human being in his or her humanness? And, by what means might we make this study?

Finding the lantern which might bring to light that which lay hidden - unrevealed in the life world of my teaching led me away from the dominant discourse on teaching - outside the pale, so to speak. Breaking the hold of ideological control requires recognising the knowledge claims and sets of values to which any ideology adheres. Diogenes's demonstration speaks of the ease with which we may be tricked into accepting something as "given"

or "inevitable" thereafter directing our questioning to predisposed ends by the very nature of its inevitability or seemingly inviolate nature.

The matter of paradigms and modes of enquiry is extremely important to this discussion. By way of example, questions oriented in the empirical/analytic paradigm, which derives from the natural science mode, are predisposed towards ordering, controlling and predicting, and are expressed in a language of objectivity; seeking cause and effect explanations and definitions that identify and label phenomena. Its interest is in knowledge that is foundational and generalisable.

Are the models and methods of scientific inquiry appropriate modes for studying children in the realm of schooling? Educative literature abounds with generalizations in the form of models, methods, techniques, structures and reams of theory that tend to reduce teaching and learning to experimental fragments and finite ends. We talk of outcomes, goals and objectives, effective teaching, core competencies, supportive environments, measured achievement. We discuss the 'role' of the teacher as motivator, resource person, organiser, manager, facilitator. We observe behaviours - teaching and learning behaviours. The educational researchers, located in the domains of anthropology, sociology and mostly psychology, from within their own favoured perspectives, endeavoured to identify and define what teaching is. The psychologists orient toward understanding teaching behaviours, the anthropologists toward human activity and the sociologists toward the role of the teacher.

... These are formulations - knowledge formulations of human behaviour roles and activities, providing understandings of human doings, measurable, and within the grasp of reasoned control. They present, indeed, a seductive scholarly and intellectual quality and legitimacy that make the understanding of teaching uncannily correct. Who would dare to argue? But we must remember that these portrayals, although illuminative, are all distanced seeings in the image of abstract conceptual schemes that are idealisations, somewhat removed, missing the pre-conceptual, pre-theoretical fleshy, familiar and very concrete world of teachers and students.

(Aoki, 1987:6)

Understanding teaching as skills, techniques and strategies is a pragmatic notion which appeals to the predicament that is so often voiced by teachers: "What should I teach, and how should I teach it?" It is a notion expressed in terms such as 'teacher competence', and 'effective teaching', translating the language of teaching into 'doing'. It has a persuasive hold at first glance. Who does not want to be effective? It presents as a neat package - identify the skills and develop them. This is not to say that teaching does not involve skills and techniques - many of these understandings are 'uncannily correct'. Do they neglect the possibility that effective teaching may be much more than this? It may have a lot to do with the being of the teacher - who the teacher is.

My experiences in the classroom tell me that human beings do not conform to scientific generalizations or consistently comply with predictions and measured or predetermined outcomes. If we return to the questions that we might ask and indeed that is being asked in this paper: what sense might be made of those unpredictable moments that so characterise our teaching lives? How might we think about them? What questions would we ask? What do they mean in our teaching lives and in the lives of children?. It would appear that these are not only questions of meaning, but also questions that are squarely located in the human dimension. Perhaps at a deeper level they ask not, what is teaching?, but rather, what does it mean to teach? They are questions concerned with what is in the interests or 'good' of children in pedagogical situations. They are moral questions. Thus it is that before any other consideration, any orientation for studying the phenomena of our pedagogical lives with children must be guided by pedagogical standards, or, what is in their interests or is considerate of the 'good'.

A research method is only a way of investigating certain kinds of questions. The questions themselves and the way one understands the questions are the important starting points, not the method as such. But of course it is true as well that the way in which one articulates certain questions has something to do with the research method that one tends to identify with. So there exists a certain dialectic between question and method. Why then should one adopt one research approach over another ... the method one chooses ought to maintain a certain harmony with the deep interest that makes one an educator (a parent or teacher) in the first place. (van Manen 1990:1-2)

During the course of my studies my research connected me with several writers whose academic writing spoke poignantly of the lived experience of teachers with children in pedagogic life. Their language reflected the kind of authenticity that was being reflected in my own journal writing and reflective interpretations. The orientations of their mode of enquiry was in the field of hermeneutic phenomenology or, more simply put, the interpretation of lived experience - it is involved in the mediation of meaning.

The work of Max van Manen has been a guiding light in my efforts to orient this inquiry in a way that was scholarly in nature yet edifying and illuminating in its questioning and considerations of the pedagogic context of my life. I use the term pedagogy without a finite definition but by way of being helpful in describing what it signifies for me, I particularly liked this small quote from Max van Manen's most recent book 'The tact of Teaching'.

The modern child must actively realise that he or she is born into a condition of possibilities. He or she is this body of possibilities. To become a person, to grow up and to become educated, is to transform one's contingency into commitment, responsibility - one must choose a life. This means that the vocation of pedagogy, of being educationally involved with children, is to empower children to give to shape to their life's contingencies.

(van Manen, 1991:3)

It is critical to point out that orienting one's research in the mode of hermeneutic phenomenology is not orienting to a procedure or definitive methodological approach. H. G. Gadamer suggested that "it is not possible, in genuine inquiry, to establish correct method for inquiry independently of what it is one is inquiring into. This is because what is being investigated itself holds part of the answer concerning how it should be investigated" (Smith, 1991:19). He goes on to say that genuine inquiry has more the character of a kind of dialogical messing about, that which the Greeks simply called 'thinking'. Gray, in his introduction to Heidegger's book, *What is Called Thinking* (1968:xi), paraphrases Heidegger as follows:

Thinking is not so much an act as a way of living or dwelling - as we in America would put it, a way of life. It is a gathering and focusing of our whole selves on what lies before us and a taking to heart and mind these particular things before us in order to discover in them their essential nature and truth. Learning how to think can obviously aid us in this discovery. Heidegger's conception of truth as the revealing of what is concealed, in distinction to the theory of truth as correctness or correspondence, is probably his most seminal thought and philosophy's essential task, as he sees it.

Heidegger allied the notion of hermeneutics or interpretation with the Greek notion of 'thinking' in his rewriting of the Western philosophical tradition around the question of Being. In his massive work, *Being and Time* (1962), Heidegger saw 'Interpretation as the means by which the nature of Being and human being is disclosed. Interpretation is the primordial condition of human self-understanding, so that a phenomenology of Being reveals its fundamental mode to be precisely hermeneutical.' (Smith, 1991:9).

Having said that this mode of inquiry is not a definitive methodology, there are a number of features or dimensions which characterise its nature. Hermeneutic phenomenology is a mode of inquiry which studies human beings in the life world - the world of the natural attitude of everyday life. In bringing to reflective awareness the nature of the events experienced in our natural contexts or settings, we seek to gain personal insight, transforming or remaking ourselves in the true sense of 'edification' (Rorty, 1979). It seeks to reveal rather than abstract, classify or taxonomize, offering the possibility of plausible insights that might bring us into more direct contact with our world. The hermeneutic imagination seeks to create meaning rather than report on it.

Hermeneutic phenomenological research is basically a writing activity. The text is the way in which we bring the life-experience into symbolic form. Hence a deep sensitivity to language is a requirement of the researcher wishing to do justice to the fullness of that life experience. Language is historically and culturally bound. 'The hermeneutic way points to how meaning is always 'webbed', challenging us to speak about our life together in a way that is both ecological and ecumenical, two terms derived from the

Greek word for "household" (*oikos*) (Smith, 1991:25). Gaining a sense of the etymological formation of words (i.e., a sense of their development in time), is essential to the interpretive imagination in that it liberates words from contexts that may have distorted their original meaning and rendered them subservient to other predispositions and assumptions. The Greek word "icon" means 'likeness', 'to be like'. Phenomenological description thinks of language iconically, rather than positivistically. It is like an icon, referring us back to what stands behind the words. Max van Manen gives us an example that makes this notion somewhat clearer when he describes the way a parent 'hears' a child stirring in the crib. Whether the child has cried or whimpered is not what is 'deeply' heard. There is something more fundamental - 'it is the power this child has over one who can "hear" (van Manen, 1980:15) - someone whose hearing goes beyond the sounds the child makes, to the call of the child in the connectedness or oneness between parent and child or teacher and child.

In responding to the *logos* we are responding to the 'truth' behind the words. The hermeneutic notion of truth resides in the original Greek meaning of truth (*a-letheia*), as unhiddenness, uncoveredness or unconcealment as reiterated by Heidegger, who sees being open to the *logos* as being open to the mystery - the truth that lies within the phenomenon - the very essence of the phenomenon.

Interpreting deepens one's sense of the basic interpretability of life itself, endeavouring to shake loose our cultural and preconceived notions of the world in an effort to discover what is going on in a particular situation. It is a multidimensional way of viewing life.

Pedagogically, the highest priority is in having children and young people gain precisely a sense of the human world as being a narrative construction that can be entered and engaged creatively; to have a sense that received understanding can be interpreted or reinterpreted and the human responsibility is fulfilled in precisely a taking up of this task.

(Smith, 1991:23)



Having tried to capture some of what hermeneutic phenomenology means it needs to be said that hermeneutics is not necessarily concerned with itself *per se*. It is not another self-defining discourse that limits itself to the texts of its own tradition. It liberates us to deepen our understanding of what it is that we are investigating by any means that is in the overall interest of what is being investigated, i.e. 'the question of human meaning and of how we might make sense of our lives in such a way that life can go on' (Smith, 1991:22).

It was not that I chose hermeneutic phenomenology as a way of researching my teaching life. Rather this mode of inquiry spoke to the life I was living - it affirmed my desire to express my pedagogical thoughts in a language that was able to express uncertainty and "take up 'difference' not as a problem to be solved but as an invitation to consider the boundaries and limits of one's on understanding" (Smith, 1991:26). It speaks not just in text but asks of the deep texture of our lives, 'what is it like? what does it mean?'. It connects us with the ground of our lives and connects with others in the shared reality of that life in its uniqueness and richness.

**Atmosphere is a way of knowing** (van Manen, 1986:31).

#### Second excerpt

*The art room looked great! Certainly a vast improvement on the corridor that was our domain last year - oh how I hated that space; there never seemed to be a sense of belonging in that noisy, public area. It was that sense of belonging that I most looked forward to in this lovely old room above the music room - a room filled with a sense of history. Its past breathed through every nook and cranny, even the dust seemed ancient.*

*It was funny how it happened - it certainly didn't happen immediately. The classes were still too big and there was a sense of activity but little more. Interested friends advised me of ways to 'deal' with the problem. "Better organisation and a rotation*

*through three or four activities would bring greater cohesion and order in the limited space." I tried it. It seemed wrong - completely wrong. Organisationally there seemed to be less hassle and everyone was 'busy' and 'productive'. The children were localised in their particular activity and cleaning up was less of a problem. It was hard to bring to words why our art classes were so dissatisfying. Last year I blamed the learning space. Was I able to find something to blame this year? Perhaps there were too many children? Maybe I might never reach that sense of belonging or whatever it was that I felt was absent in our classes?*

*At the end of the day I wondered if I had fallen into an activity trap, busying students with work that appears productive and coherent, yet which might lack a thoughtfulness of art as a way of 'seeing' or 'being' in the world, rather just something one does? Had I thought of the 'doing' of art rather than 'being' with art as an artist? What were these children learning? Were they coming to know art as a special way of seeing the world, and expressing that world through artistic means?*

*In thinking about art and what it is to create art it seemed that I had become disconnected with the way I know art. Instead of organising our time around several different activities, I created a starting point - an idea or challenge that might be played with in various ways, but which unified us in a way of conversing, meeting with each other and the materials with a sense of commonality and connectedness but from whence we could depart if so desired. Still there were strictures dictated by the limits in space, time and materials. Yet in a sense they challenged us to work within and perhaps over those boundaries.*

*Within a very short time there was a noticeable change. There was an ambience in the room - a sense of it being a special place - a place where we dwell together with art.*

*This was written early last year and perhaps marks the beginning of a change in my teaching life. It was liberating to experience that special ambience that is so hard to describe. Without it the art lessons seemed disjointed and sterile. Communicating that which seems intangible but which lives was perhaps the most difficult thing for me to express in both my*

conversations with my colleagues or in my own writing. It was not that our previous art lessons lacked content necessarily. Certainly there were artistic concepts underlying each activity. Nor were they uneducational in their presentation and undertaking, they just seemed empty, devoid of spirit, lacking the kind of energy that can so enliven and enrich our endeavours.

One other person seemed to understand the intangible quality that was missing in our art lessons. My friend and colleague Robyn, who works with me in the art room shared my concern. Robyn is an artist in her own right. Her insightful and thoughtful way with children and art afforded me a way of connecting with someone who did not offer suggestions that were functional. Her insights into that special quality that is evoked when one is with art as an artist enabled us to bring into language that which seemed beyond language and to envisage how it might become part of our environment. We were able to talk about art and how art might speak to children in ways that moved far and beyond talk of how the room was set up, or what kind of activities would create an interesting and varied, but manageable environment. This is not to say that these things are trivial or somehow remiss. Is it that they are not imbued with a knowing that makes art and being an artist pre-pedagogical first? Is it that one needs to connect with what it is to be an artist to fully appreciate it pedagogically?

Working with Robyn, led me to reconsider the notion of pedagogy and being in pedagogical relationship. Who teaches? What authorises us to teach? In classifying Robyn as a teacher's assistant, she has been labelled as one who aids another who teaches. Within the two years of our working relationship we have come to share our time with children together in a sense of being together with art and children. Had I thought of and treated Robyn in the functionary way that her job classification suggested, might things have been different? From the outset, we were both tactful and thoughtful of each other as we dwelt within our shared domain. Being together as teachers happened naturally. Recognising that quality of teacher in another and coming to share that teaching connectedness was something that evolved from a mysterious kind of 'letting something be'. It emerges from a tacit sense of trust and respect for the other.

I was reminded of the many times in my career that we were required to work in groupings and in the way of the collaborative learning ideology. The relationship that had grown between Robyn, myself and the children spoke of the spirit of cooperation and collaboration but which had evolved in a very different set of circumstances and from very different language and intentions. I keep asking whether the collaborative learning structures that have been devised to demonstrate the notion, are able to let that thoughtfulness, tact and trust of the other blossom and grow in depth and fullness?

In the context of this event my reflections brought me to question the way the change had occurred in our art lessons. Not only was there a time of thought and an educational conversation with another who understood the setting and the concern, (with changes being wrought in the educative intentions), but perhaps there are other considerations that come into play in this instance? Might there have been a change in the way the children came to live in that art room by way of their perceptions of the expectations that tend to come from how I feel about the place? Can the atmosphere or the mood of a place be entirely 'set up', or does it emanate from the people who reside within it - does it speak of something more personal, more intangible?

Last year a relief teacher used our art area and left it in a dreadful mess. Several students undertook to clean and restore the room before my return. When another teacher shared this with me, I was humbled by their care and concern for something that they knew was important to me, namely a very pleasant and clean working space. This unbidden act of care began to unlock thoughts about the way we are in relationships with children. Would we need to use the types of coercive rules and regulations if there was an attitude of care that prompted children to respond to situations involving other people, whether teachers or other children?

Thinking about art and being an artist reconnected me with a part of myself that had become submerged in the hustle and bustle of a busy teaching life. At that time I was not fully aware of the extent to which this awakening

would effect my teaching life. Suffice to say that from that moment on there was a profound change in my feeling for teaching.

### **Being with children:**

#### **do we really start from a child's view of the world?**

What would you say of a teacher who is able to ask in class a multitude of questions, but who is unaware of what it means to dwell within a question? (Aoki, 1987:22).

#### Third excerpt

*The grade 5/6 Themes activity afforded a wonderful opportunity to work with a small group of children over a period of two days. The changes that had occurred in my thinking about being an art and music teacher had ushered in many questions about the nature of art and music and the way we dwell in these areas pedagogically. Uppermost in my mind was whether I was in fact considerate of a child's view of the world when I was thinking and planning for my classes. At that time there was a young student from the conservatorium working with me for her school experience session. Our conversations had been rich and were enlarging the already opening sphere of my teaching imagination. It seemed a good time to consider the question in practice. Perhaps we would both benefit from the asking and the doing.*

*Along with the luxury of working without the normal constraints of full classes and rigid timetables, there was the prospect of integrating the arts and experiencing them in a more fulsome way. Hopefully, for those who chose this theme there would be the same sense of excitement at the end of the time as for those who chose to climb Mt. Wellington in the beginning.*

*Movement was the theme I chose. It was a fairly familiar word yet rich in possible abstractions and less-concrete interpretations. Considering how we might proceed held many possibilities in language, kinetic expression, sound and two or three*

*dimensional expression. My thinking revolved around the remembering of my past experiences and the imaginings of what might be. In this history of experience and knowing lies the richness that might be shared. Paramount though was considering where the children might be in their imaginings, and how these two imaginings might be brought together with tact and sensitivity to the topic and to each other.*

*Three questions afforded a rich starting point - a place to begin the conversation and to share our meanings:*

- 1. How do we understand movement?*
- 2. In what ways do we experience movement?*
- 3. How might we express movement?*

*This was our beginning - the end was as yet unwritten, unknowable.*

Those two days proved to be the most enriching experience of my teaching life. It was a tentative start. The puzzlement on their faces told me that they were waiting for me to tell them how we would proceed. An awkward moment passed as they took up the questions and began to toss the words and ideas around willy-nilly. The stereotypical, mundane offerings soon ran their course - the words began to flow, one idea feeding another - movement was not just dancing, boogie, rap, swimming, etc., now we were growing, shrinking, rising, falling, flowing, ebbing - the temporal dimension of movement emerged - night and day, the seasons, centuries. We looked from the macrocosm of the universe to the microcosmic world of atoms, electrons, quarks. Body movement gave way to heart-beats, circulation, being born, ageing, dying. We talked of rivers and rain, clouds and trees, robots and clocks. Qualities of movement were considered fast and slow, forward and backwards. Even emotions and moods came into it - terror, sadness, surprise, apathy, loneliness and frustration.

From their chaotic collection of words and ideas they wrote, each person preferring to work alone. The excitement and keenness to begin was electric. Some wrote prose, others poetry, some wrote stories. It was moving to see the depth, sensitivity and in some cases the spiritual quality in their work.

The reading was another matter. Bringing those words to life eluded all but one child. Where was the magic in the bringing of these words to sound? How did they hear them? Was our educative obsession for the written word cheating children of the richness of spoken language? Had we fragmented knowledge to such a degree that the connections between poetry and music had been lost? Where was the tone, inflection, tempo and dynamics - and where was the silence? They asked me to read them after we discussed some of these ideas. Was it appropriate or right? I wasn't sure initially. Upon completion of all the poems there was a kind of silence - a waiting - a savouring. It seemed as though they were soaking up the hearing of their own words in a way that, at that time, was outside their experience. There was a bond between us at that moment that transcends any description.

Thinking about giving our ideas kinetic and musical expression brought us to another excited conversation as we negotiated possibilities and groupings. Groupings were chosen on the proviso that everyone agreed with the choice. It was decided that movement would be created from the words or poetry they would select in their groups then they would create the sounds appropriate to the shapes. Each group would compose for another group so the music and movement would occur simultaneously.

There was no longer a teacher/student feel about the day - communication was easy, ideas bubbled forth in excited conversation. When problems arose my help was sought but children from other groups offered advice and aesthetic judgement as well. The humour and ease which lived in that room was a delight to the senses. We never reached the art room. It took two days to bring the creations to performance. Simple costumes were made and the pieces brought to their zenith in the Friday assembly.

It is difficult to know absolutely whether this experience qualifies as starting with a child's view of the world. What remains foremost in my mind is the sense of being with those children as another human being, not as a teacher, or an authority or a judge, or an arbitrator. Educationally their work was

stunning, the cooperation, aesthetic judgement, creative vision, techniques, skills and commitment were evident in every aspect of their two days of hard work. I gave them a word, three questions and the opportunity, materials and space to express their ideas in language, movement, sound and two or three dimensional means.

The experience changed us. There was an ongoing rapport and an expectation that this was a way that we could meet in other situations. My teaching has been transformed by the living of those two days. Previously music and art lessons were planned in a way that would encourage experimenting and creating. They were certainly not unlike, in their content, the work that was done in that session. Perhaps the difference lies in the thinking that preceded the event? Is the difference that those previous lessons were more educational in their conception, than pedagogical? What is the nature of that difference?

What would you say of a teacher who can cite well the aims and purposes of teaching, but who, in connecting with a child is unable to open himself or herself; and the child to a living with hope. (Aoki, 1987:21).

#### Fourth excerpt

*Grade 5/6 clamoured into the classroom. Our greetings were hilarious and full of familiar banter. As the class settled and we were about to begin the lesson, my attention was drawn towards Josh and David, who seemed to be sharing a private joke. Josh's reaction to David's comment seemed a little odd - certainly out of keeping with his normal preparedness to have a laugh. Something made me ask of them if we could all share the joke. David blushed slightly and gave me a defiant look while Josh seemed to get angrier by the minute. He urged David to tell me what he'd said - in fact he actually challenged him! In quite an agitated manner, Josh blurted out David's 'joke' - it was an absolutely scathing insult about me, which David obviously thought would gain an accolade from his immediate neighbours.*

*I was completely taken-a-back - the tears began falling down my cheeks as I sat there*



trying to hide the terrible helplessness and humiliation that I was feeling. I stood and uttered "How could you be so thoughtless and cruel David?" and walked out of the room, slamming the door hard. There was a deathly silence in the room behind me. I didn't know what to do - in fact I began to feel slightly ridiculous. As I stood there the silence ended abruptly with a loud hail of abuse directed at David. "Gee you're a dork David, how could you do that to Mrs A?" - "Mrs A. didn't deserve that. You'd better apologise or else!" "Boy are you in it now! Just wait till Mr. Johnno finds out!" Their castigation was quite severe. I heard the door open. David was standing behind me, crying. It was as if he was waiting for me to turn to him. I couldn't. As he came around to face me we both looked at each other uncertainly through our tears. "I'm sorry Mrs. A., I really didn't mean it - honest! They're always giving me a hard time and I thought that it would make them laugh." I replied, quite bitterly, "So you thought that it was OK to hurt me so that you would be more popular? Are you sure that this makes them like you David? Who gets hurt in the long run? I just don't believe you are sorry."

All I could think of was my hurt and that he had caused my hurt. There was an awful moment - we just looked at each other. It was then that I saw, and felt his pain. It was his pain that spoke to me and called me to hear his voice - his child's voice that, in its childness asked me to let go of my adult indignation and hurt.

Was his pain born of his regret for my hurt? Was it born of his acute embarrassment? Or was it from being in a situation from which he couldn't extricate himself? Was he fearing retribution? I don't know and I guess it didn't matter. What would using my authority as a teacher tell him? What would he learn from that? He had seen my pain. What would that teach him? Would it hold a different meaning for him? I could not really know - I could only hope. I told him that perhaps we should try anew. It would be hard and neither of us would forget easily. Perhaps if we committed to returning to normality, the tentativeness and uncertainty would dissipate in time?

David went to wash his face and I returned to the class. As I entered there was a kind of waiting silence. I could sense their questions. "What would happen now? Where was David? Was he being punished?" There was also a very strong sense of

*"We're with you Mrs. A.!" Some children were visibly upset. What was I to do? Would I go on with the lesson? How could I teach music now? I had to talk to them about it. "OK, everyone, we can't just let this go, let's talk." The floodgates opened and there was a rush of angry opinion about David's actions and a wave of empathy for my hurt. I was thankful for their concern. "But what about David? How do you think he is feeling?" There was a subtle shift in the mood of the class. The conversation moved away from blaming David toward sensing some of his pain. Perhaps their emerging concerns may not have surfaced had I clung to their righteous indignation and empathy for my hurt? They wondered whether I would 'tell' on David. Were they concerned for David's getting into trouble? Did they expect me to vindicate my hurt through some form of discipline? Did they believe that David deserved to be disciplined in that way? Perhaps they were also coming to think about their responsibility in the face of another's pain? Were they beginning to understand their part in this? Were they able to realise that they had given David the power to hurt others, and ultimately himself, by encouraging him with their laughter and its promise of acceptance? Maybe I will never know. "David is a 'difficult' child," everyone agreed. "He is always a bit 'sneaky' in his relationships with people." Is this what we saw in David? Do these words tell of who he is? Do they speak of his possibilities - who he might become? Surely what happens now will colour those possibilities?*

These were not the thoughts in my mind at the time. There was only hurt and pain. The healing distance of time and the revealing quality of reflective thought brought me into deeper relation with the experience. Perhaps my first action was not a thought as much as a reaction to the shock of the insult. I removed myself from the source of that pain as quickly as possible. Even David's tearful presence and apology couldn't penetrate the outrage. "He caused the suffering and must suffer the retribution." This is probably the best way of describing that moment. There was no immediate recognition of David other than as the perpetrator of my suffering. Who was the victim? Me!

What was it that let me 'see' David - what called me to 'see' his pain - his dilemma? It wasn't until we faced each other, until our eyes met. In that

instant we were 'known' to one another. No confrontation, no authority on my part, no defiance, remorse or any other stance on his part - just a 'knowing'. Who was the victim? Was being a victim or apportioning blame really important? That brief moment passed and whatever existed in that moment withdrew - it was enough though for me to hear his child's voice and be 'response-able' to that childness in compassion and care. To do otherwise would have deceived that sense of 'knowing'.

There was no thought of 'behaviour management' - no thought of the appropriate set of consequences that might accompany my accepting his apology. I let it be - I could do nothing to 'teach' him. I hoped that in my withdrawing my adult's or teacher's power, he would be 'response-able' to the 'knowing' that lived for such a short time, and he might learn.

When an adult turns from merely being an example of behaviours children imitate to being a real example, living the great values he or she tell children to uphold, then the adult assumes pedagogic significance in children's lives ... He or she has become a pedagogue - a true educator. What a thoughtful parent or teacher does is offer the young person a vision of what kind of life is worth living and what image of adulthood is worth aiming for.

(van Manen, 1986:44)

It was obvious that the class expected me to vindicate my hurt in making something happen to David, as a consequence of his behaviour. They were in no doubt that he was in the wrong. Might that have been the end of the matter? No voice of compassion was raised for David until I asked of his hurt. The change in the conversation and mood of the class was remarkable. Might this change have happened otherwise? In apportioning blame on the seemingly obvious 'guilty' offender, might we have overlooked our part in the situation? Our subsequent discussion raised some very interesting questions. This conversation was not in the character of a lecture on moral values. It may well have been, had I remained a victim and clung to their empathy. Rather there was a sense of connectedness in our having lived in this intense moment. How did David learn that making other people the butt of a joke gained him popularity? Who taught him? Had he learned earlier that this behaviour would alienate him from his peers, might he be in this present predicament?

That week continued as normal, with David showing no visible signs that life was anything other than business as usual. There were other signs that it was not an imagined event though - little expressions of love from many members of the class that lifted my spirits and restored my smile - a poem, a bunch of flowers, many casual visits at odd times, some home-made perfume and offers to help me clean up after art!

A change did occur over time. There was a very close bond between myself and this class. An openness existed that allowed a continuing conversation about all manner of things. David never referred to the event again. It's hard to describe the change in him but there was no sense of resentment or reaction in his manner - he was just different, and certainly less alone. Whether that incident could have wrought the changes in him is unknowable. There is only the hope that it touched him as it did me.

These reflections on some of the special moments in my teaching life are but a small glimpse of a life being renewed from within the very texture of its existence. Until early last year that life was being sapped by a sense of overwhelming helplessness and impotency in a culture that seemed deaf to the voices of children and teachers.

I could not express myself within the dominant language of teaching. It could not bring out that which was struggling to be heard. These vignettes of the living classroom reconnected me to the voice that called me to teach. They brought forth the language that is authentic to that world and which is expressed from within that world.

We all live these moments that are unique and irreplaceable. As they present to our consciousness, we act - either intuitively or with practices that are customary. So, they are meaningful in one way or another, shaping our understanding of ourselves and the children we teach. Some we forget, others live long in memory, while others still seem hardly worthy of note. Reflecting and interpreting the 'stuff' of our lives with children opens up possibilities that may pass unheeded. It allows us to 'think' our lives. It

creates meanings that are not outside the reality - generalised and abstracted meanings that atrophy what is and what might be.

Writing my life began to uncover that which lay unrevealed within it. It allowed me to go beyond the dominant discourse and to play with language that more fully describes and authenticates the experience. There is a greater "sensitivity to the subtle undertones of language, to the way language speaks when it allows the things themselves to speak. This means that an authentic speaker must be a true listener, able to attune to the deep tonalities of language that normally fall out of our accustomed range of hearing" (van Manen, 1990:iii).

Reflecting on those writings began to call forth that which had eluded me for so long. I began to 'see' and 'hear' the world as I lived it with children. David's childness called me, as the voices of children had always been calling me, but were being lost in the silence.

### **Hearing silence in the place where pedagogy truly dwells**

By a path, in its own way ... the poet comes to the brink of language. And that brink is called silence ... A silence that is like a lake, a smooth and compact surface. Down below, submerged, the words are waiting. And now one must descend, go to the bottom, be silent, wait. Sterility precedes inspiration, as emptiness precedes plenitude. The poetic word crops out after periods of drought. But whatever its express content may be, whatever its concrete meaning, the poetic word affirms the life of this life. (Octavio Paz, 1973, in Aoki, 1990:10)

In our busy world of education, we are surrounded by layers of voices, some loud, some shrill, that attempt to tell us what teaching is. Awed, perhaps, by the cacophony of voices, other voices became silent and, hesitating to reveal themselves, conceal themselves. (Aoki, 1987:3)

The experience of 'seeing' David's childness at that moment of stillness when we 'saw' each other led me to think about silence. How do I know it as silence? There was silence - physical in that there was no sound, but more - inexplicable - a kind of deadening of all else but the voice of the child. In the class, the voice of compassion had been silenced by their expectations of certain events being inevitable. Silence - it was an unshakeable notion. What is it like? Where does it reside? The idea pervaded my thoughts. It released the frustration of being attuned to something but having it constantly elude expression.

Throughout the years of my teaching I felt the presence of silence. Silence in the texts that lined the walls of the staff library - silence in staff meetings where mundane business and the talk of visiting experts and the dissemination of the latest curriculum directives hushed the conversations of teachers about living in the classroom. How many teachers would speak of having experiences like those I have described, in the way I have described them, in a staff meeting, or openly in the staffroom? A question partly answered by my own experience. I have not shared my interpretations of these experiences, as I have written them here, with any other than interested friends or colleagues. Perhaps that is the impetus behind my writing?

This brings us back to the opening paragraph in this paper. It marks the seminal thought that liberated me to live my teaching authentically - renewing my flagging spirits, urging me to think - to be thoughtful about the life I live with children. It began to be revealed - it, in turn, began to reveal what was hidden beneath its presence.

Silence like any other word has embodied meaning relevant to the way it has been experienced and thought of. As a music teacher it holds a special significance in the experiencing and making of music. Sound would not live as music were it not for the silence that punctuates the space of its existence. Strangely, it tends to exist in relative anonymity until one becomes attuned to it.

To think of silence as not just the absence of noise opens up other ways of experiencing and thinking about silence. We often think of silence as a space or a place where peace or a sense of inwardness might be experienced. Perhaps not a physical space but more of a mental space where one might be 'in touch' without the insistence or imposition of other intrusions.

Hearing silence seems a paradox. Once again we might discern the need to be attuned to silence as a 'something' rather than nothing. So then it is in the listening - the being attentive to - waiting in a kind of self-forgetfulness so that the other might speak - to look so that we might hear.

### **A look that hears**

In feudal Japan there lived a monk famed for his temple garden of morning-glories, and, a lord at a nearby castle. The lord, upon hearing of the bountifulness and beauty of the garden, sent forth to the temple a message that on the day following the full moon, he will arrive in early morning to view the garden.

On that appointed day, the monk, upon early rising, went directly to the garden and plucked all the morning-glories but one. When the lord arrived, the monk guided him to the garden fresh-laden with morning dew, beckoning him to savour to the fullest what his eyes can behold. The massive foliage denuded of the multitude of flowers he had imaged beckoned the lord to break the silence to ask of the monk, "Where are the morning-glories for which you have gained renown? "

The monk, gesturing to the lord to savour the lone flower, said softly so as not to tread upon the silence unduly, "My lord if you but allow the morning-glory to speak, this flower will disclose to you the essence of the being of the morning-glory that it is".

The lord paused, allowed his eyes to rest upon the flower, and listened with care the speaking of the morning-glory. Then he turned to the monk, bowed a little more deeply than a lord typically is wont to bow, and said quietly to the monk, "I know better now what it is to hear when I look". With that he left, upon his lips a faint smile. (Aoki, 1987:11-12)

In a sense, this story is like the sole morning-glory. It quietly leads us to hear what lies behind the words. In the same way that the monk led the lord, (a leader of many) to attune to the one flower so that he might see deeply that which was offered by the flower, so Aoki gives us this story so that we might

hear the voice that speaks within the words - following the voice of the *logos*. The monk was a pedagogue - a person who leads. He created the space for the lord and the flower to come together. He trusted, in the knowing that is pedagogical, that the lord would surrender the seductive hold of the world and his position, "to approach with bowed humility to the voice that calls". (Aoki, 1987:11-12).

It is hard to imagine the quiet mystery of this story having any likeness to the classroom. Yet it speaks, not with the voice of the 'uncannily correct', but of the 'elusively true'. (Aoki, 1987). It speaks of the intuitive, tactful sensitivity of a pedagogue who creates a space in which a transformation may occur. There is a hopefulness and trust that there will be a look that hears.

### Living a pedagogical life: hearing the call

What would you say of a teacher who follows effectively the curriculum objectives as set out, but who does not know that in a deep sense, to lead children is to follow the call of care that brought him to the children in the first place. (Aoki, 1987:21).

*Charles had just started in second term. It was his first art lesson. We were drawing the human figure and Charles was very keen to get started. "I was a good drawer in my old school." The children were vying to be first to model. We were using our best French crayons. The task was to use them on the side in broad sweeping strokes so that we could capture the essential line and movement of the figure. Large sheets of paper were handed out and we set the clock - two minutes to block out the shape of the figure. After several poses, I noticed Charles labouring over a corner of his paper. There was a tiny painstakingly executed drawing tucked away in the lower corner of the paper. "Gosh Charles, you have really taken a lot of care and time over that drawing, it is wonderfully done. Now you might like to enlarge it and fill the whole page using the side of your crayon to block in the shape first?" "We've never*



*done that at my old school Mrs. Anderson, I don't know how to do that." "We've never done it before either Charles, and if it doesn't work, it really doesn't matter." He looked at me and I could see his eyes reading my face. Charles took the risk.*

## **Perhaps before anything else we teach who we are**

*It has become more and more obvious to me in the past year that when I am teaching I am being with children. As they come into the music or art room there is a sense of reunion, a sort of "it's great to be together feeling", that was not present previously. We know each other. When I am feeling 'crabby' they respond with care and concern - and probably some caution. There is an openness that is uncontrolled and honest. We are in relationship.*

These little snippets were jotted down hurriedly in my journal before the thoughts faded from memory. It is likely any teacher could fill volumes with similar thoughts and experiences. Becoming more reflective about our everyday lives asks anew of each captured moment, what it is - what is really happening?

## **What does it mean to live pedagogically?**

Heidegger would suggest that, as we continue to ask this question 'We ourselves are in the strict sense of the word put in question by the question' (van Manen, 1980 - Introduction). Interpreting and reflecting is ultimately a very practical undertaking. It has afforded some insight into what it means to live pedagogically.

As we live each day with the children in our care, perhaps the first consideration of any teacher is the responsibility of care that is placed on us. More than the transfer or deliverance of curriculum, ours is the responsibility of being *in loco parentis*. The connections between being a parent and being a teacher are significant and rarely explored. Parents and teachers are integral

influences in the growing child. Ours is a pedagogical responsibility: protecting and teaching young children to live in the world, taking responsibility for themselves, for others and for the well-being of the planet. Do we often forget that the children in our classroom come from somewhere, and they are learning not just at school, but also at home or in the street? While these experiences of parenting and teaching are deeply connected we need to question what is similar and what is different to better understand the total life world of children.

Becoming aware of being *in loco parentis* has been one of the most important and humbling revelations to come from interpreting my lived experience. Much is said these days of being a 'good' teacher. Many schools are now developing criteria for 'good' teaching to fit the new award restructuring demands and the policy directives for creating 'effective' teaching in 'excellent' schools.

If one was doubtful of our *in loco parentis* responsibility, it might be timely to think about the expectations of most parents of the teachers of their children. Does their expectation of us merely ask that we instil in their children a knowledge of the content we teach, or do they ask more? There is also a very obvious concern for their children to be liked or cared for in a way that is linked with familial liking and caring. Much is expected of the teacher in relation to being a 'good' person - a person fit to be authorised to care for and educate children.

It is this notion of being 'good' that has such a potent influence over the way we live our teaching lives. Whose notion of good influences us? My early teaching life was overshadowed by the powerful myths of good teaching. Beverley Cunningham spoke to that experience in her paper, 'Teaching as being: the right to personhood' (1977:11), where she describes the mythological 'good' teacher as calm and gentle, unprejudiced, unbiased and impartial, never revealing their true feelings and emotions. They provide an ordered, quiet learning environment that is free, exciting and stimulating.

They are wiser than their students, knowing all the answers without error. They are united, no matter what the situation - they stick together.

Of course many of these qualities are laudable and few would argue that it is reasonable to aspire to being anything but a good teacher. Can we define good teaching, or might we describe examples of good teaching? Might it be in the realm of the teacher themselves to be open to being a good teacher? This notion is fundamental to the intention of this paper. Being pedagogical is being open to the 'goodness' in teaching, not just being a good operator, an efficient and well organised practitioner who has a wonderful command of their craft. It is the mysterious, the unique, the particular, the personal, the moral, the unpredictable and unpremeditated situations of our everyday life that call on our 'goodness'. We are called to be with children in their good - mindful and thoughtful of their not-yetness in the world - imbued with hope for their becoming adults - leading (*agoge*) them to the world by the richness of our having already walked in the world. Beings who may be trusted to invite the young into the world in the true sense of *educare* (to lead into), growing out of childhood in the true sense of *educere* (to lead out of). Going first 'is not a guarantee of success (because the world is not without risks and dangers), in the pedagogic relationship there is a more fundamental guarantee: that, no matter what, I'm here. And you can count on me!' (van Manen, 1980:4).

This may sound all very lofty and noble in the saying, but how might we relate to children who constantly challenge us by way of an almost insolent questioning of our subject knowledge or ways of teaching? What about the child who is always demanding attention, disrupting the class and making life a misery? There are those children too, who are quietly ignoring or seemingly indifferent to every attempt to interest them in the task at hand. There are no easy answers nor instructional or behavioural panaceas that enable us to overcome these difficulties easily. This paper has been written not as a philosophical discourse on what is ideal or utopian. Those trials have been part of my teaching life, and will continue to be so as each new class arrives on the doorsteps of my classrooms. But I have found that in

becoming liberated to reflect upon and interpret my own experience and the experience of children, I have come to know more fully - more authentically who I am and to understand, more than overcome, the nature of the difficulties as they are in that particular context. Moreover, these problems dissipate as the children come to know that I am listening, trying to understand their voices, their way of knowing the world. Teaching has become more joyful and fulfilling for me and thus for the children I teach.

It 'works' because it is authentic. It 'works' because it is always open to question, reflection and interpretation. Nothing is fixed and immutable, except perhaps for the listening and the care, compassion and love that must precede any action. Children know. They know if one's eyes don't match one's words. "Becoming a teacher is not something one is taught formally. 'Becoming a teacher is the most personal embodiment of a pedagogical thoughtfulness.'" (van Manen, 1990:9).

#### Fifth excerpt

*Nothing I ever did was right for George. It didn't matter what I said or did, George had a criticism, a negative comment or he just 'switched off'. It was so hard to like him. Guilt was being added to the burden of inadequacy as I struggled to find a way to reach him. Lessons were mostly planned with George in mind. He was like a magnet, drawing me to sneak a look at his face to gauge his reaction to the task. Yes, I was sometimes caught, whereupon I smiled encouragingly - it didn't work!*

*His remarks were not necessarily disrespectful, rather they were said critically and in an attitude of superiority. George's parents are musicians - could that be a consideration? Perhaps I didn't measure up to the notion of being a good enough musician to teach? It is often the way that instrumental teachers devalue classroom music (mostly from ignorance of the life world of the music class), their reasons being many and various, and often unjust. George may have been influenced by perceptions such as these?*

*He was quite gifted himself and didn't seem to be lacking confidence in a musical*

situation. It took nearly a year to come to know George. One day he told me that I was wrong - this had happened before and I always discussed the issue openly and patiently, considerate of his viewpoint. Never had we come into confrontation. This time, the statement made by me was not really questionable in this context. "It is not my way to insist on knowing all and you are well aware of the negotiable nature of our conversations, but in this case the statement is correct." It was not mine but that of the composer. At this point I showed him the publication that carried the statement made by the late Freddie Mercury in relation to the influences on their music. No answer from George. "It is not that I need to be right George, what is of concern to me is that you don't believe me." Still silence. The lesson progressed and the issue was left.

As the class left I called George back. I told him of my concern, not just for this situation but for the way he always rejected me, even when asked for his opinions or suggestions for our lessons. In our many conversations I believed that I had met him squarely and honestly and at this point I was fed up with his unjust treatment. I asked him whether there was any way that we would be able to meet each other with respect - the respect I had given him, but which I felt was denied me. Our ensuing conversation was long and revealing. It is difficult to say what lay beneath George's resistance, perhaps many things, certainly his family orientation to music had a bearing. Maybe he just wanted to end the situation, and had gone too far to recant? Our relationship has changed, it is growing slowly, but we are no longer apart - we still differ greatly but there is no resistance. Our differences are more 'impersonal'.

George is a perceptive child. There are many possible interpretations that might explain his way with me and the subsequent change. The situation is still a mystery and continues to unfold in its complexity. It was not so much my desire to be liked, as a need for there to be conversation between us. So much of our life is governed by opposition in the form of arguments, or the more formalised debate that legitimises argument. The competitive nature of our western culture permeates our lives at a very deep level. When we argue there is an in-built opposition or dispute that calls for victory or defeat. Does it embody understanding or possibilities easily, if at all?

For George, his view of music was predetermined by the culture of his home. Was it loyalty to this that called my way into question - maybe? Was it his experience that an opposing view was a sign of being unorthodox or highly individual - quite likely? Might he have needed the deeper more personal recognition that came in our conversation - I don't know? My concern was the opposition and the sense of alienation that existed between us. In discussing my dilemmas with him, he was made fully aware also of the vulnerability that was being exposed. That vulnerability is, for me, a most essential feature of pedagogical thoughtfulness, and probably the most difficult. It may have been that vulnerability that spoke and allowed him to trust.

So *pedagogy* is not just a word. By naming that which directs us and draws us caringly to children, the word *pedagogy* brings something into being. Pedagogy is not found in observable categories, but like love or friendship in the experience of its presence - that is, in concrete, real-life situations ... pedagogy is cemented deep in the nature of the relationship between adults and children. In this sense, pedagogy is defined not only as a certain relationship or a way of doing, but also pedagogy lets an encounter, a relationship, a situation, or an activity, be pedagogical. (van Manen, 1990:31)

Throughout this paper the words thoughtful and mindful have been linked to the notion of pedagogy. Max van Manen's notion of pedagogical tact speaks eloquently to the way these words have been meant. It connects thoughtfulness and tact but distinguishes between them. Thoughtfulness emanates from self-reflective reflection on human experience. Without tact it remains an internal state. Tact is acting on the thoughtfulness, even if tact consists in holding back or waiting. The word derives etymologically from the Latin *tactus* (touch) with *tactful* meaning fully in touch, and *contact* "to touch closely", to be connected - being in touch, it carries the same meaning as tact but is more intensified or enhanced.

Tact is a term that is familiar and has meaning for most of us. It suggests sensitivity and 'a keen sense of what to do or say in order to maintain good relations with others or avoid offence'. (Webster's Collegiate Dictionary - in van Manen 1990:125-6). Van Manen's comprehensive discussion describes tact and situates its meanings in the pedagogical sphere. Tact is not

understood, in this context, as simply a means of getting on well with others or maintaining good social relations. The following quote describes the 'complex array of qualities, abilities and competencies' that characterise tactful actions:

First a tactful person has the sensitive ability to interpret inner thoughts, understandings, feelings, and desires from indirect clues such as gestures, demeanour, expression, and body language. Tact involves the ability to immediately see through motives or cause and effect relations. A tactful person is able as it were to read the inner life of the other person. Second, tact consists in the ability to interpret the psychological and social significance of the features of this inner life. Thus, tact knows how to interpret, for example, the deeper significance of shyness, hostility, frustration, rudeness, joy, anger, tenderness, grief in concrete situations with particular persons. Third, a person with tact appears to have a fine sense of standards, limits, and balance that makes it impossible to know almost automatically how far to enter into a situation and what distance to keep in individual circumstances. Finally, tact seems characterised by moral intuitiveness. A tactful person seems to sense what is the right thing to do.

It is not the intention here to reiterate this work, but to briefly refer to this rich source of inspiration as it spoke to my experiences and reflections, in the hope that it may do so for others.

## **Living music and art pedagogically**

What would you say of a teacher of poetry who understands it analytically and technically, but who himself [herself] does not live a poetic life? (Aoki, 1987:22).

Often when working with student teachers, I have thought anew, that it is not enough to know one's subject, one needs to know it pedagogically. Within the last year that thought has blossomed into a notion that has enlarged and enhanced my teaching life. Reflecting upon and interpreting my teaching life, in the ways that are being described in this paper, has also opened new ways of thinking and talking about my teaching connected with the way I think about and experience the world musically and artistically - it has given me a sense of embodied knowing.

When children are working in the art and music rooms it is fascinating to watch the interplay between the whole concept, or the basic idea underlying their task at hand, and the bits and pieces of ideas that are brought to that whole or which come from their playing around with the materials or sound sources. There is an organic quality in the work - a kind of dialectic that moves between the idea of the whole, and the parts that may belong to the notion of the whole. Composing music or creating an art work around an artistic idea or concept can be daunting, or worse still deadening to children if considered in a linear or step-at-a-time way. It behoves an arts teacher to make suggestions and judgements on the unpredictable qualities that unfold during the action. Qualities like listening, heeding, watching, knowing when to let children be, and when to guide, are pedagogically and artistically oriented.

Eisner (1979:155) likens teaching to an art, in the sense that - 'teaching as a source of aesthetic experience, as dependent on the perception and control of qualities, as a heuristic or adventitious activity, and as seeking emergent ends ... teaching can be regarded as an art'. Further he goes on to say - 'The metaphors and images of schooling and teaching that we acquire have profound consequences for our educational values and for our views of how schooling should occur'. This latter quote reflects the sense of embodied knowing spoken of earlier. It is not that teaching is necessarily an art or any other metaphoric description *per se* - teaching is what it is. How it is depends on the way we as teachers understand it - how we think, and we describe it is reflected in the language that we use.

### **Creating metaphors that allow a life to speak**

Just as I came to the notion of silence as a way of thinking about the hidden voice of teaching, (wherein dwelled the authentic voices of children and teachers) I came also to imagine teaching and children through the language and intentions of art and music. It is a language that does not seek to replace or oppose other ways of speaking about teaching, if anything it augments the



imagining and possibilities for thought and speech by moving in and around the dominant discourse throwing new light on the spirit that lives in the teaching world but which is being stifled and silenced by a deadening discourse.

Envisaging the world through the eyes of an artist brings to the senses the beauty and wonder of creation. To think of the world as an unfinished art work opens the mind to the continued making of something beautiful. It quickens the senses to the aesthetic possibilities of living - seeing a world, not with a despairing heart in the seeming inevitability of chaos and catastrophe, but rather as a painting or composition that is still in the process of becoming. Each new sound or brush stroke holds the promise of a new beginning or vision, yet emerging from within the fabric of the existing work. Thus it is with the way we might think about children and their becoming. Each life enlarging the composition, hopefully adding to its beauty and wonder.

It is interesting to ponder on the musical notion of harmony. Working with children in the making of music and wondering when it is that music is present is a conversation of great interest in our music classes. We might think of the notion of harmony as the way a piece comes together in the cooperation this is part of being together musically. Or, we might think of harmony as the blending of sounds in the western musical tradition of tonality, where tones are in relation in a hierarchy created by the acoustic phenomenon of the overtone series. Within this notion there is a codified system, a tradition that relies on the conventions that have evolved from centuries of sacred and secular music making. While the overtone series of pitch relationships is a 'universal' or physical phenomenon, it is fascinating to think about the way western tradition has created meanings from this phenomenon, and, in other civilisations a totally different set of meanings and conventions evolved. Might we also be taking-for-granted the cultural influences on what is perceived as beautiful? What might this tell us about the unquestioned acceptance of our own cultural values and beliefs? Might we be stifling rich possibilities and severing our experience from a vast source of alternative ways of knowing the world?

Harmony suggests connectedness. It relies upon the relationship of separate elements to give it character and beauty. Whether we hear beauty in the traditional blending of tonal harmonies, or are delighted by the extemporising qualities of modern jazz, or of the more *avant garde* musical expressions such as the harsher sound relationships and more demanding listening that is required by 'new music' - harmony is a relationship between the congruent and the incongruent. Just as sound is articulated and given sense and form by the presence of silence, so harmony is dependent upon the interplay of differences. Beautiful harmony, in a classical sense (i.e., within the context of the conventions of the western art music tradition), exists in the presence of the sense of tension and release created by dissonance. Music is coloured by this dissonance in the interest of beauty. How mundane it would be to live in a world of sound that was always in unison. It would be like living in the presence of monotones, grey and lifeless or at best highly restrictive melodic movements that moved from perfect unison to perfect intervals. Perhaps there may be a kind of beauty in this form, but surely it would wear thin in the absence of dissonance.

How might the metaphor of harmony speak to our pedagogic lives? Within the classrooms and the staff room, do we allow for beautiful harmony that is characterised by the dissonant voice? Are we able to live with difference and uncertainty as a way of knowing, or do we need to adhere to the idea that we must look for finite solutions to problems, finding the assumed 'right' way to do something or be someone? Do we take the official curriculum directives and policy as given and immutable? Can we live with the dynamics of uncertainty? Might there be a sense of hope and promise of beauty in the opening up of our minds to the difference that can create harmony.

Many times, in the staff rooms of many schools, I have sat and felt the oppression of the voice that seeks conformity in unison. It brooks no questions - questions create dissonance and deviate from the official melody that has been prescribed. If one thinks this is extreme, we could cast our minds back to the time, in the dark ages, when it was sinful to include the interval of a perfect fourth in sacred music. There were many other intervals

that did not exist in the music of this time, but a fourth is a perfect interval - harmoniously correct, and, as such quite acceptable to the conventions of the day. However, this perfect interval had an unusual nature, it also masqueraded as an augmented fifth in certain harmonic settings, (unknown at that time) and thus created a dissonance that called the conventional hierarchy into question musically. It became known as the 'Devil's Tritone'.

Have things changed so much today? Do we cast dissonance into the realm of evil or might we hear it as that which attributes to beauty. This takes us back to George - his dissonance was disruptive. It did not respect the voice of the other, it stood in opposition by his adherence to opinion rather than the pursuit of the inherent meanings or truths that may be discovered in a conversation. Harmony also has the character of a conversation. In the way that my talking with George was a plea for a truer conversation, one that is oriented to openness - openness to the topic, questioning the topic and not seeking domination of the other - so might the metaphor of harmony reveal to us the nature of conversation rather than opposing through debate or argument.

The quality of an orchestral composition or the music played by any group depends on the differences and connectedness of all the parts. The voices of the instruments and the textural blending of those voices create the conversation that may lead to the 'musical truth', that calls forth the presence of beauty. Domination and opposition destroy that 'truth' by drowning the voices of others and leaving us with a cacophony.

I am reminded of being in a situation in staff meetings where the gentle asking of a question is treated as the re-emergence of the 'Devil's Tritone'! It is saddening hearing the voices of teachers being marginalised for their questioning of the dominant curriculum directions being introduced, or the favoured policies of a top-heavy hierarchy. Where was the conversation that calls for the topic to be called forth to reveal its truth? Why are persons treated as outcasts because they question the *status quo*? Are we, in silencing the dissonant voice, losing sight of the truths that might be revealed in

conversation, just as we lose sight of beauty if we don't understand the true nature of harmony?

This sense of embodied knowing enabled expression of the insights and meanings that are coming to shape my pedagogical thought, in the metaphors that describe the way I know the world. Their relevance to others lies not in trying to apply them as a general rule, but in the way they might speak to another who is struggling to find expression in their own teaching lives. It liberates language from the bind of objectivism and the metaphors of technology and science and opens it to the other by its invitation to conversation and interpretation.

### **Living with hope and possibility**

ah yes,

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.  
Through the unknown, remembered gate  
When the last of earth left to discover  
Is that which was the beginning;  
At the source of the longest river  
The voice of the hidden waterfall  
And the children in the apple tree  
Not known because not looked for  
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness  
Between the waves of the sea.

(T.S. Elliott's 'Little Gidding', in Eisner 1979:i)

Perhaps more than anything this paper seeks to communicate the liberating nature of interpreting lived experience from a particular life world. Teachers have a deep responsibility of care in their pedagogical relationship with children. A responsibility that has at its heart a kind of love that seeks that

which is in the good of children. Of concern in our teaching lives are the many and varied constraints and pressures that may overwhelm this sense of love and vocation. Teacher 'burnout' is a prevailing issue that has many causes. When teaching loses its meaning, or when meanings are imposed and taken as irrevocable and thus are not questioned in their appropriateness for the good of children and teachers, we run the risk of becoming mere functionaries who live our lives in a world that does not hear our voices, and which, by extension, does not trust us with knowing our teaching pedagogically.

It is often easier to see when something is not, than seeing when it is. There are ways of thinking and acting that are anti-pedagogical. Living with a sense of hopelessness and a refusal to acknowledge our responsibility to the world in which we live defeats being in pedagogical relationship with children. For parenting and teaching is founded on hope, lest we strike from the hands of children the possibility of shaping their own futures. A view of the world that denies human beings the opportunity to grow to 'their fullest potential in relation to the rest of society is pedagogically corrupt' (van Manen, 1990:211). Seeing children as human capital or resources to serve the economic good or to benefit the social collective, denying them their uniqueness and individuality is pedagogically reprehensible. At the same time, a philosophical or political view that ignores the connectedness and reciprocal responsibility of human beings as they realise themselves within a society, is also anti-pedagogical. Denying full membership in the human community, and pedagogical care on the basis of any differences, be it gender, race, religion or whatever, is unjustifiable pedagogically.

While pedagogical thinking may be the impetus for political thought or action it cannot be pedagogical and be turned into a particular theory, political or otherwise. It is by its very nature a way of questioning the moral appropriateness or fitness of other theories, policies or social and cultural structures. As people who live pedagogically with children it is our

responsibility to create the space, conditions and possibilities for children to grow up and create a world of their own making.

Writing my life and bringing it to a sharing in this paper reaffirms the potency of this form of inquiry in leading me to seek that which seemed concealed - calling it forth in its essence (its beingness) as indeed I was called to heed its presence and be with it. T.S. Elliott's words speak the meaning I am struggling to bring to language - 'Not known because not looked for but heard, half-heard, in the stillness'. That was where I started, the journeying continues, ongoing, the ending unknown. Re-visiting the familiar 'remembered gate' to know it as if for the first time.

I have come to know stillness - to hear silence.

My prayer is that, as I continue to hear,  
the voices of children will continue to speak.

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